

Nez Perce National Historic Trail, 1877 Maps and GPS Waypoint Data

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SUMMARY REPORT of TRAIL RESEARCH

This is one of a series of trail research reports that I am producing for public use. It is a summary of my research and contains only a maps set and a GPS waypoint data set. My usual coverage of history and research methods has been left out. The intent of these summary reports is to make them available to trail pounders and trail history enthusiasts as soon as possible.

As my age advances well beyond 65, my energy and stamina are decreasing to the point where I feel an urgency to get this form of my research into the hands of future generations who can continue it and improve it.

PREFACE

The first historic trail I ever hiked was the Nez Perce National Historic Trail (NPNHT) in the Clearwater National Forest of North-Central Idaho. It was the summer of 1986. At the time, I was doing research on the Lewiston and Virginia City Wagon Road of 1866 (also known locally as the Bird-Truax Trail), but I keep seeing thin, aluminum, home-made signs that had been stapled to trees along the trail. There were perhaps 20 of them. I soon found out that they had been put up by the Clearwater Forest archeologist, Karl Rohnke, in the late 1970s or early 1980s. I would learn in later years that Karl had marked the Bird-Truax Trail but in most places, the NPNHT and the BTT were the same.

My research on the BTT soon expanded to the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail (LCNHT) and I decided to combine my efforts on the three separate trails into one effort to document the Lolo Trail National Historic Landmark that included all three trails. The BTT was a government trail constructed in 1866 between the Weippe Prairie in Idaho and Lolo Pass on the Montana-Idaho border. Over the years between 1986 and 1995, I was able to gather all the government records on the Virginia City Wagon Road and accurately plot its location across the Bitterroot Mountains.

Between 1995-1997, I served as the President of the Nez Perce National Historic Trail Foundation and, through contacts made during these years, I was able to add to my collection of trail research information.

After 1995, my trail research efforts were concentrated on the BTT and the LCNHT, but I continued to gather information about the NPNHT and many other historic western trails. In 2008, I began extensive research on the remaining segments of the NPNHT, traveling to Joseph, Oregon and following the route into southern Idaho.

Research on the three trails culminated in a precision GPS survey of the actual trail treads between Lolo Pass and Musselshell Meadows. The two-summer survey was funded by the Lewis and Clark Idaho Governor's Committee and conducted in 2001 and 2002.

In 2008, my efforts again turned to the NPNHT and I completed a plot of the entire trail and its landmarks. In 2016, I organized the research work into maps and a data set that could be published.

Sources of information that have been most influential on my research are the following:

1. File Microcopies of Records in the National Archives: No. 95, Roll 13. RECORDS OF THE OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR RELATING TO WAGON ROADS, 1857-1881.
2. Original Government Land Office (GLO) plat maps now maintained by the US Bureau of Land Management. <https://glorerecords.blm.gov/default.aspx>
3. The Flight of the Nez Perce, Mark H. Brown, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967. ISBN-10: 0-8032-6069-5.
4. Ashland University Archives, Ashland, Ohio, George Benson Nicholson Collection, Civil Engineer. Accession number: 2012-02.
<https://ashland.pastperfectonline.com/archive/A9240FB2-11AE-4799-9E0C-387697085155>
5. The Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail: Comprehensive Plan. United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Northern Region, 1990.
https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/npnht/landmanagement/planning/?cid=fsbdev3_055670

Inference in Historic Trail Research

Inference is a very important concept in all types of research from theoretical physics, to medicine, to historic trails. The skill of the researcher in understanding inference, properly applying it, and acknowledging its use is of paramount importance. A researcher can never claim that the conclusions reached using inference is "absolute truth," and yet, this often happens.

“Evidence” > Logic & Reasoning > Conclusions

Conclusions reached by Inference are not Absolute Truth

The dictionary definition of inference is:

- a conclusion reached on the basis of evidence and reasoning.
- synonyms are: deduction, conclusion, reasoning, conjecture, speculation, guess, presumption, assumption, supposition, reckoning, extrapolation

Despite its importance, some researches do not seem to fully understand the roll of inference in their research. For example, in medicine, we hear the term "statistical inference" which means to present research where the results are reported in terms of probability and statistics, and the reader is often left to make their own conclusions. This is not really “inference.” The conclusions reached by “statistical inference” are one step removed from actual inference and, thus, produce conclusions that are even more speculative, and possibly misguided.

The dictionary defines statistical inference as "the theory, methods, and practice of forming judgments about the parameters of a population and the reliability of statistical relationships, typically on the basis of random sampling." The key term in all research inference is "**forming judgements.**" It is the process of forming judgements that sometimes goes far astray in reporting research results.

In historical trail research, inference plays a big roll in trying to understand the history of the trail as well as trying to accurately determine its location on a map and documenting associated landmarks and campsites. This is especially true when original-source historical documentation is limited.

In my research, I acknowledge my use of inference to produce my results and, to the best of my ability, do not claim to have produced "absolute truth."

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MAPS AND DATA

MAPS: Three maps were created to accompany the data included in this report. The resolution is 6 miles to a square. At this resolution, the reader can get a good idea of the location of the trail as determined in this research. The source maps have an inherent resolution of 0.05 miles but it would take hundreds of megabytes to include them.

DATA: The GPS data set has been created at a resolution of about 0.2 miles, however, some trail segments in Idaho and western Montana have been recorded to a precision of 3-15 meters. The data set is a comma delimited file that documents the GPS waypoints and the waypoints for historical locations and landmarks.

A comma delimited file (.csv) of the data set has been embedded in this PDF file using the protocol for PDF attachments. Comma delimited files can be used by most GPS units and GIS map tools.

To access the data set, click on the paper clip icon in the lower left corner of this PDF document. The file will open in the default program for .csv file types. Save this file to a folder.

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MAPS

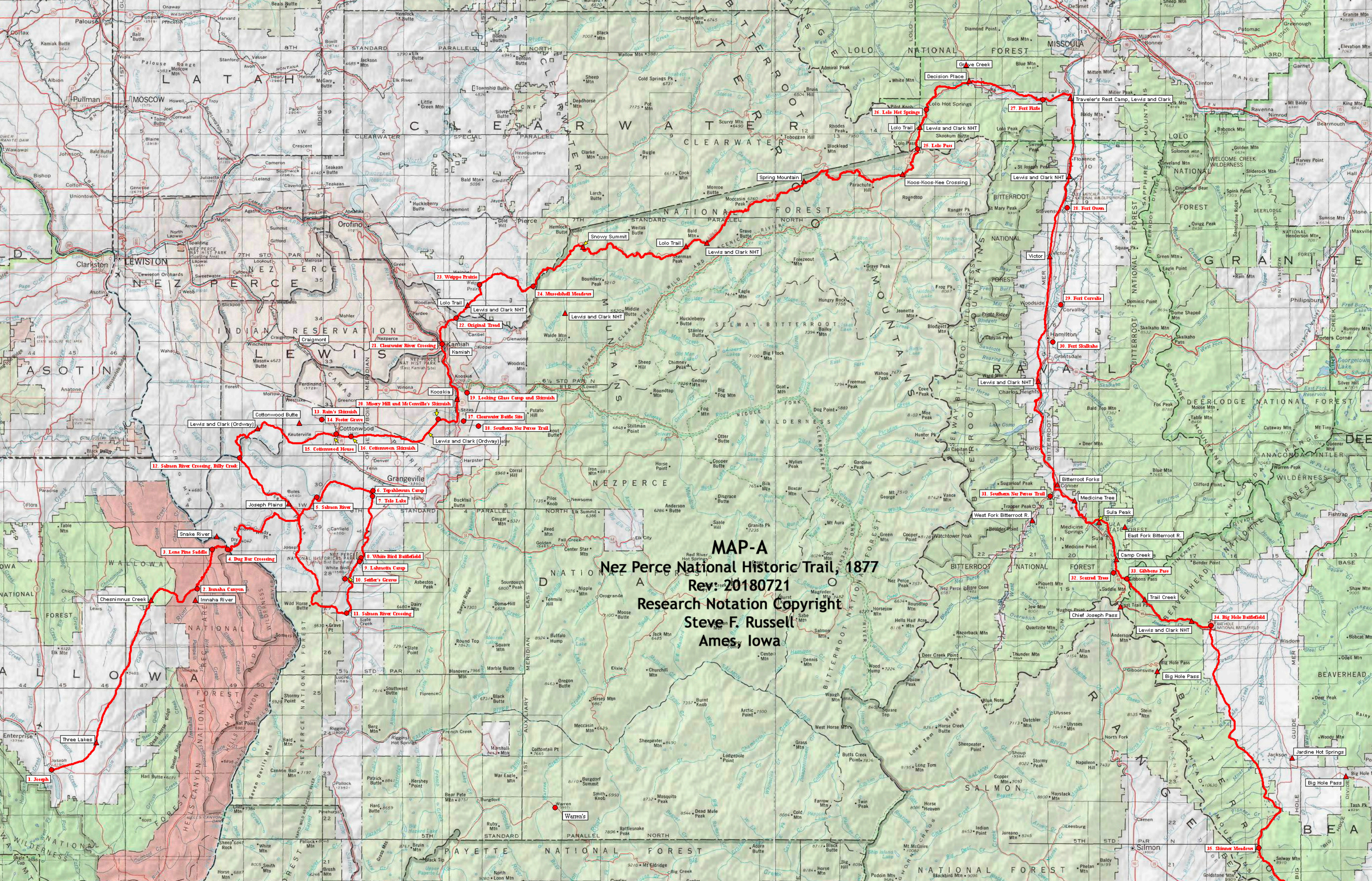
MAP-A Joseph, Oregon to Big Hole River, Montana.

MAP-B Big Hole River, Montana to Bootjack Gap, Yellowstone Park, Wyoming.

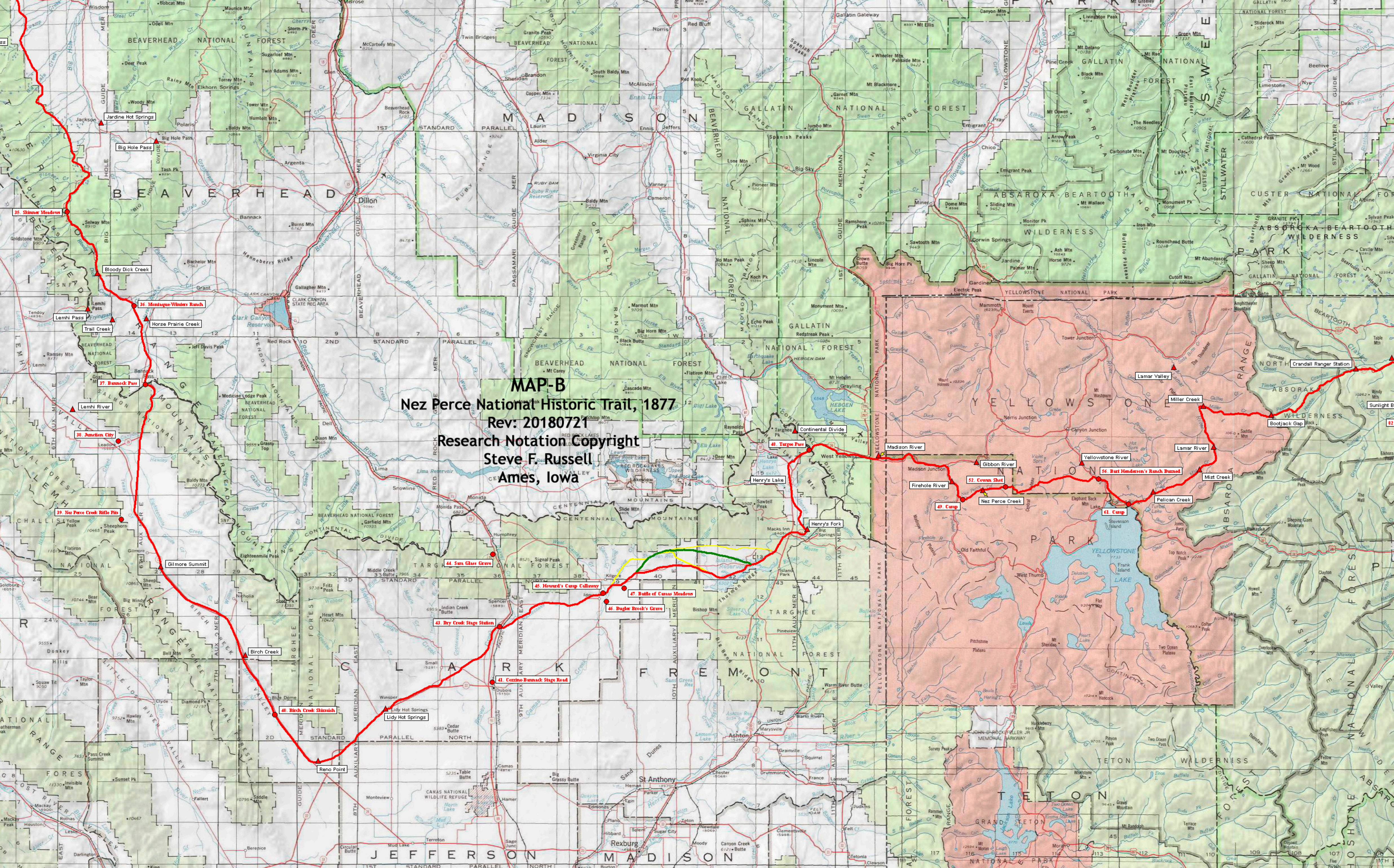
MAP-C Bootjack Gap, Yellowstone Park, Wyoming to Bear's Paw Battlefield (Snake Creek Battle).

Placenames/Landmarks, Beginning to End

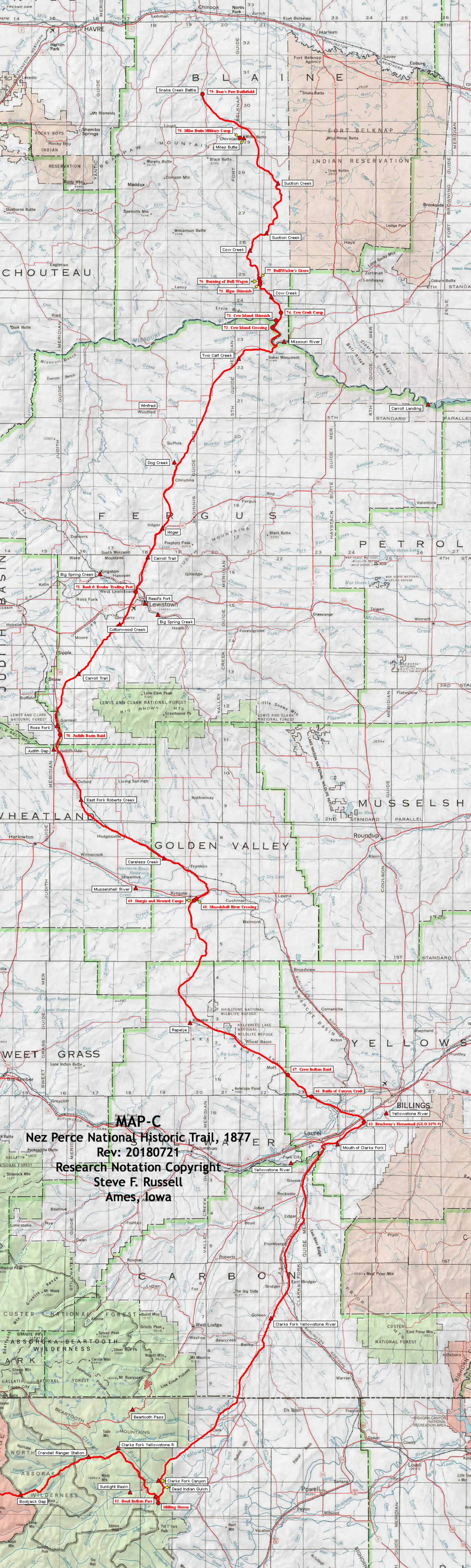
Joseph, Findlay Buttes, Imnaha Canyon, Snake River, Dug Bar Crossing, Joseph Planes, Salmon River, Tolo Lake, White Bird, Russell Bar, Billy Creek Crossing, Keuterville, Cottonwood, Stites, Kooskia, Kamiah, Lolo Creek, Weippe Prairie, Lolo Trail, Musselshell Meadows, Snowy Summit, Sherman Peak, Indian Grave Peak, Indian Postoffice, Koos-Koos-Kee Crossing (Haskell Cr.), Lolo Pass, Lolo Hot Springs, Grave Creek, Fort Fizzle, Lolo, Fort Owen, Victor, Hamilton, Bitterroot Forks, Gibbons Pass, Big Hole Battlefield, Big Hole River, Skinner Meadows, Bloody Dick Creek, Bannock Pass, Gilmore Summit, Reno Point, Lidy Hot Springs, Dry Creek Stage Station, Henry's Fork, Targee Pass, West Yellowstone, Firehole River, Nez Perce Creek, Yellowstone Lake, Mist Creek, Lamar River, Miller Creek, Bootjack Gap, Crandall Ranger Station, Clarks Fork, Dead Indian Pass, Dead Indian Gulch, Clarks Fork Canyon, Mouth of Clarks Fork, Yellowstone River, Bruckway's Homestead, Canyon Creek, Lake Basin, Rapelje, Coulee Creek, Musselshell River Crossing, Careless Creek, East Fork Roberts Creek, Judith Gap, Carroll Trail, Ross Fork, Cottonwood Creek, Big Spring Creek, Reed & Bowles Trading Post, Hilger, Dog Creek, Two Calf Creek, Missouri River, Cow Island Crossing, Cow Creek, Suction Creek, Miles Butte, Bear's Paw Battlefield (Snake Creek Battle).



MAP-A
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MAP-C

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